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40 Libby economic workshop coming into focus

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LIBBY — Revitalizing the economy of southern Lincoln County will be the focus of events in Libby the weekend of April 24-26.

Sen. Conrad Burns will attend a community reception April 24, and Rep. Dennis Rehberg will be the guest speaker at a luncheon April 25. Gov. Judy Martz is tentatively scheduled to give closing remarks on April 26 at the workshop, which will be held at the Lincoln County Campus of Flathead Valley Community College.

Final plans for the "Dream It, Do It" workshop will be discussed at an April 16 meeting.

The workshop will study local transportation issues, education and training, an aquatic center, telecommunications, bike and walking paths, parks and aesthetics, an ATV jamboree, an asbestos research center and redevelopment of the Stimson property.

"This is a result of a group of people going back to Washington, D.C. last June to attend a Senate subcommittee hearing held by Sen. Max Baucus," said John Konzen, chairman of the Lincoln County commissioners. "The question was

posed by the senator: What can be done to help Libby erase the asbestos image because of the Superfund?"

At that hearing, Marianne Horinko, who oversees the EPA's Superfund program, said that the EPA does help communities rebuild from economic downturns caused by toxic pollution and subsequent cleanups. Konzen said the EPA is the lead agency in planning the workshop, and they are working closely with the county, the city and local businesses. Baucus was unavailable to attend the session this month because of a scheduling conflict.

Jim Christiansen, the EPA's onsite coordinator for the Libby Superfund work, said the Libby workshop is a new approach for the EPA. "We are working outside of what we generally do," Christiansen said. "It's beyond what we typically do."

His biggest concerns are expectations and public involvement.

Some people expect the federal government to throw a wad of money at the Libby-Troy problems and others believe the government will bring in representatives of other federal agencies to do likewise. Christiansen said neither of those scenarios are being considered.

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